RITCHIE, MICKEY AND ME

HM drum supremo Cozy Powell spills the beans to SYLVIE SIMMONS

COZY POWELL, and a bottle of beer are sitting under an umbrella at the Sunset Marquis hotel in Holywood, by the very same swimming pool where the drummer once broke his nose showing off to the suntanned starlets.

"Which is all I can break; I'm a drummer and if I break anything else it's over, isn't it?"

When we spoke, the American tour with the Michael Schenker Group had just finished; "the hardest tour I've ever done of any band I've been with", moaned Cozy.

The band had only just been assembled before going straight into a British tour, then out for over two months straight in the States, plus driving inbetween all the gigs in bad weather in a small tour bus.

"It was good for me in a way, though, because it was a step down from the quote rockstar unquote sort of trip where you fly everywhere and get treated like royalty. It was good for me to get a kick up the arse."

For the last nine weeks the Cozy Powell arse has been firmly planted behind a drum kit in small clubs ("which I loathe") and on bills opening for everyone from cowboy band Molly Hatchet ("a total mismatch") to Cheap Trick.

"It's always difficult when you're supporting because you've got to take it as it comes. The audience has mainly come to see the headliners — but there are certain cases, when you've got a band like Michael's who's been around before, or myself, they'll come and see the individual people just to see what they're doing. So of course, we are having it alot easier than a lot of bands that are just starting out."

The last time I spoke to Cozy, he was moaning about pretty much the same thing with Rainbow, which had resorted to supporting then far-from-superstars REO Speedwagon in an attempt to break the States. A case of here we go again?

"Yes. I seem to spend my life trying to crack America. The first tour I did of the States was in 1969 with Jeff Beck, which was an immediate headline thing, and ever since then I've been coming over here to the Final Challenge. I'm getting sick and tired of trying to crack America. Maybe someday I will."

MAYBE if he had stayed with Rainbow — after all, the hits keep coming . . .

"Yeah — Rainbow started getting far too commercial and I'd long lost interest in the stuff we'd done.

"I think it's all gone sour, Rainbow, for some reason, I don't think Ritchie realised how good a band he had at one point. That possibly sounds a little conceited on my part, but I think the band was really together and gelling really well and everything was working out really nice, and he just seemed to throw it all away. He didn't seem to want to play anymore and lost interest, I don't know."

Maybe he'd been so busy looking for the perfect line-up he couldn't see he had it under his nose?"

"Could be. Ritchie and I are still really good friends. He came to see us a while ago. I left the band very amicably and there's no hard feelings. I just think five years was quite long enough. We'd both seen enough of each other. It's a long time to work with any relationship, especially in an artistic way, and it was better to part as friends rather than as enemies. A lot of people who have left or been fired from Rainbow have gone on less good terms than I did.

"I felt that the time had come when I wasn't putting 100% of what I could do into the band, and when you feel like you're just picking up your paycheck at the end of the week, then it's time to get out. Why bother? I'd go and work at Fords and bang out car parts if I felt like that about it.

"If I do something I want to do it properly or not at all. There is no in-between with me. It's the same with anything else I do. I figured it was time to get out of Rainbow while the band still had a lot of respect.

"Since then I don't know what they'll do. I wish Ritchie a lot of luck because he's going to need it. Because he's changed personnel so many times now that the kids are going to start to lose a lot of faith in the band." As for his replacement: "I saw him

continues p.24

COZY POWELL: "I'm a bit of a hired hand"

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